

VZCZCXRO2781  
RR RUEHDBU RUEHSL  
DE RUEHKV #2127/01 3441458  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 101458Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KYIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8953  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KYIV 002127

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UP](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: CHERNIVTSI AND THE 2010 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:  
THE BLUEING OF AN ORANGE OBLAST?

REF: KYIV 2115

Classified By: DCM James Pettit for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

[11.](#) (C) The presidential race in Chernivtsi Oblast, as in Ukraine as a whole, is boiling down to a contest between PM Yuliya Tymoshenko and front-runner Viktor Yanukovich of the Party of Regions (PoR). Despite the oblast's traditional "orange" orientation, the main concerns of voters -- the state of the economy, and revulsion at corruption and political sniping in the central government -- weigh against the Prime Minister, and her local campaign appears to be on the defensive. For its part, the PoR has carefully built support among the oblast's Romanian-speaking minority; if the PoR can mobilize this base on election day January 17, Yanukovich could conceivably finish first in the oblast in the first round of voting. He need not carry Chernivtsi Oblast in the second round in order to triumph nationally; he need only cut into Tymoshenko's margin of victory across the "orange" heartland. The PoR's strategy in Chernivtsi Oblast is a microcosm of how the "blue" team might succeed in doing so.

-----  
Bukovina  
-----

[12.](#) (U) We met with various campaign officials, the Committee of Ukrainian Voters, and representatives of the Romanian Consulate General during a December 7-8 trip to Chernivtsi. Chernivtsi Oblast (region), the smallest of Ukraine's oblasts by area, is located just north of Romania and Moldova, and comprises territory taken by the Soviet Union from Romania in 1940 and again in 1944. According to the 2001 census, Ukrainians comprised about 75% of the population of 919,000, while ethnic Romanians and Moldovans numbered about 182,000 (19.7%). Most of Chernivtsi Oblast is comprised of the northern portion of the old Austrian province of Bukovina. The city of Chernivtsi was largely built under Emperor Franz Josef and still has a distinctly "Mitteleuropa" look. Our interlocutors maintained that the oblast has a tradition of tolerance that continues to the present day. Chernivtsi Oblast voted heavily for President Yushchenko in 2004 and gave roughly two-thirds of its votes to "orange" parties in the 2007 parliamentary elections, vice just 13% for the Party of Regions (PoR).

-----  
Plenty of Campaigns, but Only a Two-Way Race  
-----

[13.](#) (SBU) During our visit, the public squares of Chernivtsi were bejeweled with the different-colored tents of various campaigns (blue for PoR front-runner Yanukovich, white for PM Tymoshenko, orange for incumbent President Yushchenko, combat

camouflage colors for former FM Yatsenyuk, yellow for parliamentary speaker Lytvyn, and red -- what else? -- for Communist Symonenko), with campaign workers handing out literature and chatting up voters. Lytvyn was campaigning in town personally during our visit and other candidates had swung through town earlier this year. Nevertheless, most of our interlocutors said that the race in the oblast, as in the country as a whole, boils down to Yanukovych and Tymoshenko. Yatsenyuk was born and raised in Chernivtsi, and his local campaign staff boldly predicted a strong first-place finish for him in the oblast. Most of our contacts, however, maintained that Yatsenyuk's campaign has imploded locally just as it has nationally (reftel), and that he would not be a major factor.

14. (SBU) Our interlocutors were unanimous that the major issues were a) the economy and b) disgust with corruption and political infighting in Kyiv. Disillusionment over the squandered promise of the Orange Revolution was universal. Issues such as NATO, the EU, Russia, or the status of the Russian language are playing a negligible role in the campaign.

15. (C) The head of the Tymoshenko campaign, Petro Gasyuk, an MP who has been in politics for 17 years and helped found the local branch of Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna Party, was clearly nervous about her prospects. Gasyuk was convinced that -- as national pundits have speculated -- Yushchenko's unrelenting criticism of PM Tymoshenko is the result of a deal with Yanukovych to deny Tymoshenko the presidency at any cost. Gasyuk fretted about the difficulty of energizing "orange" voters in this campaign and gave the impression of struggling

KYIV 00002127 002 OF 003

just to maintain previous levels of support for the PM and her party.

16. (C) By contrast, Heorhiy Khodorovskiy, a former Ukrainian ambassador to India and head of the local Yanukovych campaign, believed that a splintered "orange" vote could give his candidate a first-place finish in the oblast in the first round of the election with 25-30% of the vote. Khodorkovskiy declined to predict that Yanukovych would win locally in the second round, but indicated they expect to give Tymoshenko a run for her money.

-----  
Yanukovych's Ace in the Hole  
-----

17. (C) An interesting local wrinkle in the presidential race is the fact that the PoR has assiduously courted the ethnic Romanian/Moldovan vote, a factor mentioned by all our interlocutors except, curiously, the PoR's Khodorovskiy:

-- The Orange Revolution of 2004 was perceived by the local Romanian population as a nationalistic Ukrainian movement, which they viewed with detachment or even a certain mistrust.

-- The local branch of the PoR has made an effort to place ethnic Romanians in the city and oblast party leadership. Other parties have only token Romanian representation in their local leadership. The only ethnic Romanian in the Ukrainian Rada belongs to the PoR; he comes from Chernivtsi Oblast.

-- The Banchenskiy Holy Ascension Orthodox Monastery, located in a heavily Romanian district of the oblast, is very active in charitable work, and our interlocutors singled out the monastery's orphanage for particular praise. The PoR, and Yanukovych personally, have donated very publicly to the monastery's charitable activities, earning the gratitude of the local people who benefit from the monastery's work.

-----  
Parenthetical: A Closed Window on Europe

-----  
18. (SBU) Notwithstanding the oblast's proximity to Romania and other EU member states and local pride over Bukovina's history as an Austrian province, our interlocutors pointed out several factors that work against the sort of EU gravitational pull that one might expect in a western Ukrainian border region like Chernivtsi:

-- The neighboring parts of Romania are not significantly better off economically than Chernivtsi Oblast, so there is no obvious correlation in the popular mind between joining the EU and enjoying any perceptible increase in prosperity; "it would be different if we bordered the U.S.," quipped one of our contacts. Large numbers of people from Romania now cross the border to buy goods more cheaply in Chernivtsi, which has created the perverse perception that joining the EU, at least for Romania, has resulted in higher prices rather than higher living standards.

-- Many residents of the oblast have gone as guest workers to places like Portugal, Spain and Italy; by contrast, almost no one from Chernivtsi seeks work in Russia (a destination of many Ukrainians from other regions). However, people seem focused less on the economic benefits of these opportunities, and more on resultant social problems -- particularly the plight of "virtual orphans" being raised by grandparents while both parents are off working in foreign lands.

-- We would add that Chernivtsi's ethnic Romanian population, which ordinarily might be expected to act as a bridge to EU member Romania, is politically aligned with the PoR, which at a national level is interested more in Ukraine's integration with the CIS than with the EU. The PoR reportedly supports measures to facilitate family and economic contacts across the border with Romania, and Chernivtsi's ethnic Romanians might well be satisfied with that. They are, in any event, too few in number to influence PoR policy nationally.

-----  
Comment: A Bluer Shade of Orange?  
-----

19. (C) Chernivtsi Oblast remains a part of Ukraine's "orange" heartland, and it is almost inconceivable that Yanukovych could beat Tymoshenko here in the second round. However, if the PoR gets Romanian-speaking voters to support Yanukovych en bloc, and gets them to turn out in higher numbers than disillusioned ethnic Ukrainians, it is entirely

KYIV 00002127 003 OF 003

possible (with some support from ethnic Ukrainians) that Yanukovych could place first in the first round with 25-30% of the vote, ahead of six or so candidates splintering the "orange" electorate. That outcome alone would represent a big psychological victory for the "blue" camp. Quite apart from any morale boost, however, Yanukovych does not need to win in oblasts like Chernivtsi in order to triumph nationally; he merely needs to chip away at Tymoshenko's margin of victory. The PoR's wooing of Romanian-language voters in Chernivtsi Oblast offers one vignette of how they might succeed.

TEFFT